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DUGALD MCFARLANE

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About the year 1829 or 1830 there came to Texas, from the state of Alabama, a Scotchman named Dugald McFarlane. He left his native land when a boy of eighteen years or less, and settled first in South Carolina. After a few years he removed to Alabama, where he married Miss Eliza M. Davenport, and lived at or near the town of Tuscaloosa. He was about thirty-three years old when, following in the footsteps of many worthy sons of the South, he, together with his wife and children, emigrated to Texas.

The family traveled overland by private conveyance, and experienced the usual hardships attending a long journey over an unsettled country. Arriving at San Felipe, the seat of governmental authority for Austin's colony, the head of the family selected Matagorda as their future home, and located his head-right on the Colorado river, eight miles above the town. He identified himself with the interests of the settlers about him, and became a most useful citizen. His only surviving child, Mrs. Eureka M. Theall, is living at Bay City, at the home of her daughter, Arie Davenport (Mrs. B. F. Sweeney, Sr.), and from her recollections the leading incidents of his life have been obtained. At the time of the immigration to Texas she was a little toddler, just old enough, as she afterward told, to slip her father's pocket knife into a water jug, which was carried along for the use of the family during a day's journey. She recalls the days of her childhood at Matagorda, when the Indians roamed about the neighborhood, and, as they were Carankawas and reputed cannibals, their visits were greatly dreaded. At that early period the Mexicans traded extensively with the Texans, and their trains of burros loaded with silver dollars to be exchanged for tobacco and other commodities were frequently seen and always welcomed at Matagorda. Mrs. Theall says that, although her parents owned slaves, they were left in Alabama in the care of an uncle, since the laws of Mexico were such that they would have been free on Texas soil. The first servants her parents had in Texas were

Scotch, a man and a woman, who lived with them for two or three years. Many were the hardships for a long time endured by her mother and others who, like her, had been tenderly reared and were now reduced to the hard necessities which life in Texas at that period involved. At one time, as the Colorado river afforded almost the only water supply, the women of Matagorda made its banks their common laundry. Soiled clothing, tubs, etc., were hauled in an ox-cart to the landing; as there were no washboards, the clothes were soaked, well soaped and placed on a strong bench called a "battle-board," designed for the purpose, and thoroughly beaten with a heavy paddle. They were dried on the bushes. In this primitive fashion were the women obliged to carry on one of the most important branches of their household economy.

The first two-story house erected on the bay shore of Matagorda, known as the Bluff, was built by Dugald McFarlane, and was for many years the home of himself and family. It was so tall that it served as a kind of a landmark for the ships at sea, and the sailors kept a lookout for "McFarlane's Castle," as they were wont to call it. Colonel S. R. Fisher owned the only other house on the Bluff in the early Colonial days.

Dugald McFarlane was a Royal Arch Mason of the thirty-third degree. "By dispensation of the Grand Lodge" of South Carolina, he was sent to Alabama to establish Masonic lodges. His daughter has the Masonic chart issued to him by the Grand Lodge of South Carolina. It is of vellum and is inscribed with the autographs of the officers of the lodge. This chart was carried by its owner throughout the Texas revolution, and it was twice captured by the Mexicans, but each time was returned to its owner by order of Santa Anna, who was himself a Mason. This valuable Masonic chart possesses a double value to its owner from the fact that it was filled in by her mother. Her father's great interest in Masonry induced him to write a "History of Freemasonry," which is incomplete, but has been carefully preserved by her, together with other records by his hand. His name occurs in Masonic records as occupying such honorable positions as Grand Lecturer, and District Deputy Grand Master of District No. 2, which was the district of Matagorda. One of the early lodges at San Augustine bore the name McFarlane No. 3.

Mrs. Theall is of the opinion that there was a lodge at San

Antonio established by her father, but I could find no record of it in the "Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Texas," mentioned in a succeeding note.

When, in 1835, the oppression of the Mexican government became unbearable to the Texas colonists and a revolution was their only recourse, Dugald McFarlane enlisted in the volunteer army as a private.

History relates that, on November 21, 1835, as a member of Captain Philip Dimmit's company at Goliad, he was one of a committee of five elected to prepare a preamble and resolutions expressive of their confidence in their captain, and their belief in their right, "under existing regulations—or, rather, during the want of all regulations," to elect their company officers. This was simply the assertion of their privilege and right as citizen volunteer soldiers to elect their immediate commander, and was a vigorous protest against an order from headquarters at San Antonio to Captain Dimmit to deliver the command of the fort and town to Captain George M. Collinsworth.¹ The same history relates that on December 20, 1835, Dugald McFarlane's name was enrolled among the ninety-two men, many of them members of Captain Dimmit's company of volunteers, who signed and published what is known as the "Goliad Declaration of Independence." Brown says² that fully a third of these signers "maintained their pledges with their lives, largely as members of Fannin's command."

During the revolution Dugald McFarlane rose to the rank of captain of artillery, and at one time had from four to six cannon under his orders. His daughter related that, while in command of this company, he was so closely pursued by the Mexicans that, to prevent his guns from falling into their hands, he sank two of them into the Brazos river at Brazoria. The following letter from her gives an account of this interesting episode:

He was on his way to San Jacinto, had crossed the Brazos river and was marching toward the scene of conflict; they were near enough to hear the booming of artillery and the shouts of the soldiers, but suddenly they saw approaching a large body of Mexicans, who had discovered my father's cannon, and about the same time they started in pursuit of his company. There was

¹See Brown, *History of Texas*, I, 376-7. The daughter of George M. Collinsworth, Mrs. Rebecca Turner, is living at Angleton, Brazoria county.

²*History of Texas*, I, 432.

nothing left for him to do but order a retreat, which he did, the Mexicans in pursuit. He reached the Brazos and embarked some of the guns, carriages, and men; the ferryboat was not nearly large enough to cross all at one trip, time was too precious to waste, so they could not wait to load the other guns, as the river was on a boom at the time, and the current very strong. It would have jeopardized the lives of the soldiers too much to risk the loading of the other guns, so my father ordered them sunk in the muddy, turbid stream, where they were completely lost in the mud. The Brazos resembles the Mississippi in the turbidity of its waters during a freshet, as the mud boils up from the bottom. So it was not when General Urrea invested Brazoria that the cannon were sunk, but it may have been at this time that the Masons had to meet under a liveoak tree, as they had no lodge room.¹

Dugald McFarlane seems to have continued in the army after the battle of San Jacinto, which, by giving victory to the Texans, had caused many soldiers to feel that they were justified in returning to their homes. His name occurs as captain of artillery in the list of appointments sent by President Sam Houston to the Senate for approval on May 10, 1837, and, in the *Secret Journals of the Senate of the Republic of Texas*, these names are printed under the heading, "A List of Officers actually in the Service of the Army of the Republic of Texas."²

In 1842 McFarlane returned to civic life, and we find him representing Matagorda county in the Congress of the Republic of Texas during 1842-43. At this time he was known as Colonel McFarlane, and when the war between the United States and Mexico broke out in 1846, he again enlisted in military service. His son also entered the service of the United States at this time and was adjutant of a New York regiment during the Mexican War.

¹In a reminiscence of Masonry in Texas written by a distinguished member of the order the following words were used: "In March (1836) Brazoria was abandoned. Urrea soon took possession of the place at the head of a detachment of the Mexican army, and the records, books, jewels and everything else belonging to the lodge were utterly destroyed by them and our members scattered in every direction. See *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Texas, 5837-5853*, Vol. I, page 7.

According to the Diary kept by General Urrea, he occupied Columbia and its Port at four o'clock on the afternoon of April 21, 1836, and on the 22d marched to Brazoria, which he reached at 10 a. m. of the same day. "See pp. 25 and 26 *Diario Militar del General José Urrea Durante La Primera Campaña de Texas*, 25-26."

²See the Journals just cited, pages 44-45.

Dugald McFarlane was about five feet ten inches in height, well proportioned and strongly built, of fair complexion, light blue eyes, light brown hair tending toward auburn; his habitual expression indicated firmness of purpose, tempered by tenderness and kindness. He was perfectly erect, had a military bearing, was dignified but genial in manner, very strict as to morals, veracity and all good conduct. He was a born commander, whose men were drawn to him by the strong ties of confidence and friendship. His latter years were passed at Brazoria, where he had many friends, and there, in March, 1861, at the age of sixty-four, he breathed his last. Thirty-one years of his eventful life had been given to Texas, and this period was just completed on the eve of another eventful era in the history of his adopted land.

Dugald McFarlane was not only a colonist of Texas, a soldier and officer in her armies, and a law-giver of the Republic, but he was also a thoroughly successful teacher, a man of letters, and a pioneer journalist—a man of versatile talents, such as go to make an ideal citizen. He kept a diary, and therein were recorded details of thrilling historical events in which he had borne a part. His participation in the revolutionary war of 1836 and again in the war between the United States and Mexico caused writers of history to consult him when preparing their records. He corresponded with Brown and with Robinson on these subjects. He was intensely interested in all public matters, and contributed to newspapers and magazines, especially to papers published at Matagorda and Brazoria. Among these were *The Democrat* and *The Planter*, and the consolidated *Democrat and Planter*. In the *Columbia Democrat*, published every Tuesday by E. H. Cushing, may be found a "Chronological Index of Texas History," the careful work of his hand, signed "Dugald."¹

In partnership with his son-in-law, Joseph Theall, he published at Matagorda *The Chronicle of the Times*. His interest in Masonry induced him to contribute to *The Masonic Signet and Journal*. Among his contributions to *The Chronicle of the Times* was a series of sketches called "Rumpled Records of a Buckskin Budget," which were copied from that paper by *The Democrat*. The name suggests adventure, sport, pioneer life in plenty, and would no doubt reveal pen pictures of the times and tell us much

¹From an undated clipping.

of the life of him who gave them their euphonious title and signed himself "Dugald." Are they in existence? Probably stored away in some attic, or packed away in some chest whose original owner has long since died, these records of an interesting past may be brought to light.¹

Dugald McFarlane left two children, a boy and a girl. When the former, William Wallace, was about fourteen years old, as he was of delicate constitution, through the advice of the physicians who recommended a long sea voyage, he entered the service of the Texas navy. Captain Taylor, who was a friend of the family, selected the lad as one of his aides. In naval records of a later date his name appears as a midshipman, on board the *Austin*, flagship of Commodore Edwin W. Moore. When, after many trying experiences, this branch of the service of the Republic of Texas was finally disbanded, he was qualified to enter the service of the United States with the rank of captain. For a long time he served as quartermaster at Tampa Bay, Florida, and was then transferred to San Antonio, Texas, where he remained about four years. He then went north again, and was sent to sea, making trips for the government to the Guano Islands, and was in command of a ship to the Mediterranean. After engaging for a while in the oil refining business in New York, he again entered the government service and held positions in the postoffice department in New York City and Springfield, Massachusetts. During the Mexican War (1846-48) he served as adjutant in a New York regiment. He died several years ago,² survived by his widow and a son and daughter. Recent letters announce the death of the widow at the age of seventy.

Mrs. Theall, the surviving daughter of Dugald McFarlane, inherited much of her father's talent; she was sent to school in Kentucky, where she received a liberal education, which fitted her for the vicissitudes of a long life full of good deeds. Her husband, Joseph Theall, served in the Confederate army in Captain Lewis Stroble's cavalry, and afterward in the commissary department under Captain William McMaster at Columbia, Texas.

¹Mrs. Theall says she had a small box containing her father's manuscript, which was nailed up and put in a crib or loft of her house at Columbia (probably the oldest house in the country), which is now occupied by one of her grandsons.

²See Dienst, "The Navy of the Republic of Texas," *THE QUARTERLY*, XIII, 19.

Exposure in the service injured his health. He was for many years an invalid. After the war Mrs. Theall opened a school at Brazoria; she also taught at Columbia, and was for seven years postmistress at the latter place. Her acquaintance in Brazoria county was large, and the many pupils who profited by her instruction regard her with affection and gratitude. She is familiar with the historic localities of that section, and numbers among her former friends prominent citizens of the early days, who have passed away. While she contributed to the press from time to time, her pen was used chiefly as a recreation, and she preserved none of her writings. She was the mother of two sons and two daughters, and the care of her family and household filled her life. But one of her children survives, the daughter with whom she makes her home, and whose family are all settled in Bay City and Brazoria and Matagorda counties. While the weight of eighty-odd years has impaired her physical strength, her mental grasp is vigorous, and her fine memory summons at will varied and interesting pictures drawn from her many eventful years in Texas.